

Testimony of Marcia L. Hale  
President, Building America's Future  
Before the Speaker's Task Force on Intergovernmental Affairs  
Restoring the Partnership  
May 17, 2018

Good afternoon, Chairman Bishop, Congressman Connolly, and members of the Task Force. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today and for the opportunity to discuss the possibility of reconstituting the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. I commend you for your interest in improving collaboration between all levels of our government and hope that today's hearing will provide you with some helpful information and insight.

During my career, I have worked at various levels of government – a city hall, a county planning commission, a Governor's Washington DC office and the U.S. House, Senate, and White House. Presently, I am the president of ***Building America's Future***, a bi-partisan, non-profit, national infrastructure coalition founded by Mike Bloomberg, Ed Rendell, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Several years ago, we added Ray LaHood as a national co-chair. Our membership is comprised of state and local elected officials from around the country. ***BAF*** advocates for bringing about a new era of investment in infrastructure to enhance our nation's prosperity, economic growth, and international competitiveness. We are working to advance common-sense ideas and policies to address the challenges facing the country in terms of building and re-building our infrastructure. We believe we need to identify and implement long-term and sustainable funding sources and embrace advances in technology that will make our infrastructure more efficient and resilient.

As Assistant to the President and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs at the White House during the Clinton Administration, I was a Clinton appointee to ACIR. We found the work of the Commission to be very beneficial. Perhaps the most constructive component was having the ability to hear the views of various appointed and elected officials at all levels of government. To truly understand the impact of actions taken in Washington on states and localities, it was always important to listen to elected officials from across the country. It was critical that ACIR operate as a bi-partisan organization. I would stress that it would have not worked otherwise. I worked closely with several of the members of the commission, Democrats and Republicans alike, on issues that we all cared about.

There are many issues that a reconstituted ACIR could consider. Finding a way to provide a forum for discussing the coordination of federal programs that impact local governments is important. Obviously, appointing the right membership is crucial. Those appointed should want to work in a bi-partisan and collaborative way to solve problems for ACIR to be effective. Too often in the world we live in today our first instincts are to go to our partisan corners, as our levels of government have no permanent established entity for consensus building. However, discussion amongst Democrats and Republicans – and at all levels of government – might improve our legislative responses to serious issues the country is facing.

I would like to suggest, if you reconstitute ACIR, that you consider working first on issues where there is common ground between the parties, but also where there is a pressing need to legislate solutions for the future.

The rapid advancement of technology is impacting every American. The way this is changing how we commute, travel, and interact with each other might be an appropriate area to work on in the near-term. I urge you to choose a few issues where we haven't (yet) gone to our partisan corners and try to advance some common-sense solutions. Look at issues within health care, immigration, energy, transportation or several other areas where new issues have arisen and will need to be dealt with at all levels of government. Ask Mayors and Governors what problems they would most like to become a topic of discussion. For example, we are facing challenges over the next several years regarding autonomous vehicles, drones, and numerous other infrastructure and transportation related issues. Many of these issues require new thinking and bi-partisan solutions informed by the elected leaders who will need to implement policies in their cities and states.

To expand upon that, and as a specific example, we are fast approaching a time when autonomous vehicles will be introduced into our transportation system. What safeguards need to be built into our systems? How will Washington legislate and how will local communities need to respond to this legislation or regulation? How will autonomous cars integrate into our highways and cities? We will undoubtedly have cars with drivers and autonomous cars sharing our roads and highways. What about the transition period – the next 5-10 years? And what is needed beyond that? Imposing federal solutions on Mayors and Governors without their input is likely to cause friction and inefficiencies. But the reverse is also true. Reaching out to state and local elected officials and working in collaboration with federal elected and appointed officials through a new ACIR could help move solutions that are beneficial to all. As states and cities legislate on potentially contentious issues, greater cooperation and communication with federal officials would be beneficial.

Another issue within the infrastructure arena is the standardization of public-private partnerships. We live in a world of scarce resources. We need to streamline the PPP process to enable the private sector to participate more fully – where appropriate – in building and rebuilding our U.S. infrastructure. Not all projects lend themselves to private participation, but where it is appropriate, we should simplify the process. A bi-partisan discussion including all levels of governments and viewpoints could move this public policy issue along.

An interesting example of bi-partisanship at the mayoral level is instructive. Mayor Steve Benjamin (Columbia-SC) and Mayor Bryan Barnett (Rochester Hills, MI), the Democratic president and Republican vice president respectively of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, have agreed to a two-year bi-partisan strategy – the first time in decades that this has happened. The two mayors decided on a joint platform and announced they intend to work in a bi-partisan manner as they implement a shared agenda. A change in the Conference leadership next year should not slow the progress on important issues. Both mayors, and one assumes the entire membership of USCM, believe this is a better way to advocate for the issues they are most concerned with when they come to the Congress and the White House.

Again, I congratulate you on your willingness to pursue this issue. I believe the country is looking to elected officials across the country to solve our most pressing issues. Citizens are tired of the endless discussions and arguments. Establishing an entity that allows for greater understanding of the impact of federal legislation on cities and states could help our discourse.

Asking Mayors and Governors to participate in the shaping of federal legislation will advance consensus and cooperation. I stand ready to be of assistance and applaud you for your work on improving the intergovernmental relationships in this country.